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ABSTRACT

Designed for use in curriculum development and as an instructional guide for preschool programs in Shasta County, California, this framework provides information on curriculum areas, developmental indicators, and appropriate activities at the preschool level. Specifically, this framework represents a resource for teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators, and the Board of Trustees in planning courses of study, developing instructional objectives and learning activities, selecting instructional materials, and evaluating programs. Following a brief foreword, the philosophy behind the preschool curriculum is described, emphasizing the importance of a play-based, developmentally appropriate environment. Next, developmental indicators are described and appropriate activities and content are listed for the following 14 curriculum areas: (1) social and emotional development, emphasizing activities that develop children's self-confidence; (2) physical development, including gross and fine motor skills and the promotion of self-help skills; (3) cognitive development, including activities relevant to children's experience; (4) creativity, stressing the use of open-ended activities; (5) mathematics; (6) reading, emphasizing regular reading experiences and listening skills practice; (7) language skills, highlighting the importance of respect for children's home language; (8) art; (9) music; (10) science, placing an emphasis on the act of discovery; (11) nutrition, suggesting the use of cooking activities to engage children in learning; (12) social studies; (13) play; and (14) special activities for handicapped or other special needs students. Contains 34 references. (BCY)

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PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

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FORWARD

This Preschool Curriculum Framework is designed to be used for curriculum development and as an instructional guide for the Shasta County Office of Education Preschool programs. It can be a useful resource for teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators, and the Shasta County Board of Trustees when planning courses of study, developing instructional objectives and learning activities, selecting instructional materials, and for program evaluation.

All who were involved in the development of this framework have an understanding of the principles of child development, and these principles have been integrated into this framework. Those involved also recognize that teachers have a great role in curriculum development. Curriculum is not a constant for the preschool age child. Teachers must have the ability to alter the curriculum to meet the developmental needs and abilities of the children they teach.

This framework is designed to articulate with the California State Department of Education, Child Development Division, Program Quality Review document. The Program Quality Review document holds the premise that the curriculum should be based upon developmentally appropriate activities for the preschool child. Generally accepted principles of child development are used as guides in planning a child-centered program. The Program Quality Review document is composed of components consisting of administration, developmental program, staffing, support services, and family/community involvement. This framework aligns with the developmental indicators as found in the Program Quality Review document. These indicators are arranged by curricular areas. This curriculum framework was developed based on those curriculum areas. While curriculum areas are specifically identified, they will be presented to the students as part of a total integrated approach designed to meet the needs of the whole child: emotional, social, physical and intellectual.

The preschool experience is the first contact with the formal education process for children. It is at this time children make assumptions about teachers based upon this first school experience. It is also at this time children learn about the nature of school, what to expect and how to participate, as well as developing the concepts which will form the basis for later learning.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PHILOSOPHY

An appropriate early childhood educational experience for preschool age children must meet the needs of the whole child: emotional, social, intellectual, and physical. The curriculum needs to be developmentally appropriate and recognize the child's need for play.

The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) has recognized the essential role of play in a child's healthy development.

> ACEI believes that play is a powerful, natural behavior contributing to children's development and that no program of adult instruction can substitute for children's own observation, activities and direct knowledge. Children will master their experiences through continual play, which is actually the most intensive and fruitful learning in their whole life cycle. (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 1988, p. 140)

The nation's largest professional association of early childhood educators, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), believes that "a major determinant of the quality of an early childhood program is the degree to which the program is developmentally appropriate" (Bredekamp, 1987, pp. 1-2). Curriculum that is developmentally appropriate is both age and individually appropriate. Curriculum is designed for the age and the various needs of the individual child.

A play-based, developmentally appropriate environment for preschool age children has a well planned underlying structure. Learning centers are used to provide activities geared to meet the needs, interests and abilities of the whole group as well as those of the individual child. It encourages children to be independent, make decisions, and to share in the responsibility for their own learning. The facilitation of social interactions, cooperation, and learning from other children is a very important part of the preschool curriculum. Children are urged to explore their environment, to problem solve, and to become active learners. Emphasis is on helping the child develop positive self-esteem.

CURRICULUM AREAS

Social/Emotional

The child's social/emotional well-being is a strong determinant in the way the child will grow and develop. A positive self-concept is necessary for children to utilize gains achieved in other areas of their developmental growth. It is during this preschool age period that children develop a sense of trust and autonomy. Children move from their self-centered world to an awareness of the world around them. The child must learn to develop positive relationships and to trust their environment. For children to be successful they must have the opportunity to experience success. Self-confidence is important in order for the child to participate and learn. There must be a genuine feeling of acceptance for each child. The child's self-perception is influenced by how the child perceives he or she is viewed by others.

The social/emotional curriculum focuses on the child as an individual and as a member of a group as well as the child's cultural identification, thoughts, feelings, and interests. Learning activities are planned to promote the child's self-confidence and foster the realization of individual learning potential. It is through the interaction with others that the child begins to understand that people can differ in their abilities, attitudes, and appearances. It is important that the curricula enhances the child's understanding of diversity and that differences and similarities can be appreciated and valued. Children need to develop a strong sense of self-worth and a respect for others.

The relationship between the child and the teacher plays an important part in the social/emotional curriculum. This is the foundation on which future teacher/child relationships build. The more satisfying the relationship, the more likely it is the child will want to participate in other social relationships. The methods the teacher can use to promote the child's social/emotional growth are varied. One of the most frequent methods is that of modeling. Young children often pattern their behavior on that of the teacher. It is important to realize the impact the teacher and other adults have upon the classroom climate.

The social/emotional curriculum is designed to promote a positive self-concept by ensuring that each child experiences initial success. Children are encouraged to plan their own activities and projects. Child-initiated learning is valued and promoted. Children are encouraged to problem solve. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ Helping the child become aware of him or herself as an unique individual, and to help the child develop a positive self-concept.
- ❑ Encouraging the child to become aware of the feelings of others as well as learning to recognize his or her own feelings.

- ❑ Assisting the child in acquiring means of expressing feelings in such a way that the child is able to participate in satisfying social contacts with others.
- ❑ Helping the child to become a kind, caring, empathetic and self-disciplined person.
- ❑ Promoting problem solving and decision making.
- ❑ Assisting in the development of positive family relationships.
- ❑ Fostering activities that promote creativity and individuality.
- ❑ Providing activities for children to interact in one-to-one situations, and in both small and large groups.

Physical

Motor development helps develop the child's sense of mastery and self-control while assisting in the development of a positive self-concept. Movement skills need to be an integrated part of the total early childhood curriculum. Physical development is often divided into two domains. These are the gross and fine motor skills. The gross motor skills refer to the movement of the large muscles. These muscles are used in such activities as crawling, jumping, swinging, hopping, running, climbing, pushing, and pulling. The fine motor skills involve more precise movements of the small muscles such as the fingers, eyes, hands, and mouth. The fine motor skill area can be refined to include perceptual-motor, visual-motor, sensory-motor, ocular-motor, and hand-eye coordination.

Physical development occurs in a predictable manner. Infants roll over before they sit, stand before they walk, and walk before they run. Development proceeds from large muscle to small muscle development. The implications for the early childhood curriculum is that ample opportunities need to be available for large muscle development. Active, physical play should not only be allowed but encouraged. Opportunities for fine muscle development must also be provided.

Physical experiences, both large and fine motor, provide many worthwhile experiences contributing to the child's total development. In this area, as in all areas of the early childhood curriculum, the extent to which a child develops a positive self-image is dependent upon the level of success the child has in various learning activities and in the environment as a whole. In physical activities, most children experience success and they also find they need to work and share with others. Learning to work with and share with others is an important learning process that will assist the child in later activities, both social and cognitive.

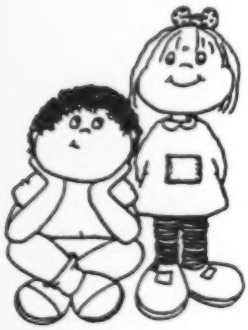
The promotion of good health and safety practices also contributes to the physical development of the young child. A safe and secure environment must be provided for the child. Children need to be free to fully explore their world without unnecessary restrictions. Children also need to begin taking responsibility for their own health

and safety. Self-help skills such as toileting, dressing appropriately and being aware of physical dangers are to be encouraged.

Self-help skills, gross and fine motor activities, and the promotion of health and safety practices are very much a part of the early childhood curriculum. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ Developing range of motion and muscle strength.
- ❑ Promotion of activities for both large and fine motor activities.
- ❑ Regular vigorous physical activities.
- ❑ Development of movement attributes which include coordination, rhythm, balance, speed, endurance, and flexibility.
- ❑ Activities for the establishment of directionality and laterality.
- ❑ The development of body awareness and position in space.
- ❑ Planned experiences for sharing and cooperation.
- ❑ Developing imagery, visualization, and concentration skills.
- ❑ Established classroom rules for health and safety.
- ❑ Development of self-help skills through planned instructional activities and regular classroom routines.
- ❑ Providing activities that allow for maximum activity and participation for everyone.
- ❑ Encouraging activities that provide for invention, self-discovery, and self-direction.

Cognitive



The development of the cognitive domain in young children is the development of analytical thinking and reasoning. Children are not empty vessels waiting to be filled. Learning is a complex process that results from the interaction of the child with his or her environment. Preschool age children are naturally curious. They are eager to learn and learn best by actively exploring their environment. This age child gains knowledge about the world through playful interaction with objects and people. Young children do not need to be forced to learn. They are easily motivated by the desire to make sense of their world. In order for children to fully understand what they have learned, the information must be meaningful to them.

Young children learn about themselves and the world around them through observation, interaction, and seeking solutions to problems. Children's learning is integrated during the early years and cannot be defined by subject area. An integrated curriculum approach is more meaningful to the preschool age child. The curriculum needs to be built upon the needs and interests of the children. The teacher is the facilitator for the child-initiated, developmentally appropriate activities in the classroom. The teacher creates the environment and facilitates learning activities so that each child may grow to the maximum of his/her potential. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ Classroom activity centers that introduce or expand experiences and concepts.
- ❑ Thematic centers that focus on a specific theme or topic that stimulates or enriches.
- ❑ Skill centers that concentrate on one or more skills. The skill center is used to introduce, reinforce or review appropriate skills.
- ❑ The provision of active materials, such as blocks, trucks, dolls, dress-up clothes, manipulatives, and games that encourage conversation and interaction.
- ❑ The provision of open-ended materials such as sand, water, or wood for carpentry that sets the stage for independence, experimentation, and the lengthening of the attention span.
- ❑ The opportunity to participate in both intuitive and analytical activities.

Creativity

Every individual is creative to some degree. Creativity appears to involve intuition, originality, and divergent thinking. Originality in thought or action is creativity. It is the ability to find new answers to old problems, to see relationships to previously unrelated objects or ideas, and to view the world in a different manner. Creativity is much more than the "Arts" and shows itself in many different aspects of an individual's life. Creative expression fosters self-esteem and provides for opportunities for self-expression. The creative process is very satisfying to the individual.

It is during the early childhood years that children can be encouraged to let their creativeness blossom. The preschool classroom traditionally fosters self-expression in young children. Open-ended activities and the exploration of materials set the stage for creativity. Many aspects of children's play interact to promote creative activities. The preschool teacher can foster creativity through play by providing a variety of interesting and unstructured play materials to encourage experimentation and exploration. The teacher needs to stand back and let the child explore and experiment with materials while respecting the child's imaginative ideas. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ The provision of open-ended materials and supplies.
- ❑ The avoidance of models, dittos, workbooks and coloring books.
- ❑ Emphasis on process over product, allowing for the child to explore and experiment with the process.
- ❑ Creation of an environment that develops a sense of trust, autonomy, and respect for individual and cultural differences.
- ❑ Provision of activities that provide for problem solving and the interaction with various materials.
- ❑ Providing children free access to materials and supplies.

- ❑ Recognizing and appreciating children's ideas and thoughts.
- ❑ Facilitation, not interference with the creative process.

Mathematics

Mathematics for preschool age children needs to be viewed as the development of relationships. The child learns to see the relationship between more and less, large and small, full and empty. Concrete experiences and manipulative activities are used to explore and make assumptions about relationships. Children are active learners who find and use patterns and draw conclusions. If mathematics for preschool age children is viewed in a relational manner, there is no need to memorize the names of numerals, to form numerals, or to know basic number "facts." As children begin to draw conclusions and to test their perceptions, they then become able to transfer that knowledge to numbers and number operations.

It is necessary to provide opportunities for children to practice and experiment. Children need to be able to do an activity over and over again to test their perception that the relationship will continue to exist. Using many different types of materials and moving from the simple to the complex allows children to experience success. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ Developing the concept of classification: sorting or forming groups by similar attributes, discovering likeness and difference, and sorting by one attribute.
- ❑ Sequencing by size, number and time.
- ❑ Comparing relationships: size, number, volume, height, more, less, and time.
- ❑ Patterning and orderin: moving from simple to complex, repeating, describing, extending, completing, and creating patterns.
- ❑ Measuring: length, volume, and weight.
- ❑ Developing the concept of time: before, now, and in the future.
- ❑ Providing activities to actively explore space: over, under, above, below, near, and far.
- ❑ Shape recognition and exploration.
- ❑ Exposure to numbers, numerals, counting, and recording mathematical information.
- ❑ Problem solving; relating mathematics to the child's world.

Reading

The interest in reading begins early in life as the parent reads to the child. This interest also begins when the child is talked to, sung to, and when told simple nursery rhymes. The child begins to understand that words have meaning and there is something special about books.

It is impossible to divorce the development of language skills from pre-reading skills. As children experience oral language and written

language, they begin to see the relationship between talking and reading. Pre-reading experiences in the preschool should build on the child's already existing knowledge of oral and written language. The curriculum needs to focus on language that is meaningful to the child, not on isolated skill development. Preschool children have many experiences with which they can begin to understand the meaning and importance of written language. At this age they become aware of writing and symbols in their environment such as the name of their favorite fast food restaurant, road signs, grocery labels, and their own name.

It is important to be respectful and sensitive to the cultural and ethnic background of the child. Some children are not read to by their parents. These children lack many of the experiences of other children on which they can use as a foundation for reading. Children that come from homes where English is not the primary language, or from homes where certain dialects are used, need experiences that build on their primary language or the use of dialects of which they are familiar. All children need to feel success as they explore oral and written language. Reading experiences need to be part of an integrated approach. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ Regular reading experiences that enable the child to learn how books work, that print makes sense, and that print and speech are related, as well as providing simple enjoyment.
- ❑ Experiences with manipulatives that encourage left to right activities, the classification of objects, sequencing, and patterning.
- ❑ Activities for visual and auditory discrimination.
- ❑ Diverse reading and language activities such as puppetry, story telling, rhyming, singing, and the dramatization of written language.
- ❑ Exposure to good literature.
- ❑ Symbol recognition and matching.
- ❑ The development of listening skills.
- ❑ The development of labeling skills.
- ❑ Books constantly available for the child's use.
- ❑ The provision of concrete firsthand experiences on which children can build concepts.
- ❑ Reading to children for their pleasure and enjoyment.

Language

Language is personal expression, it is social communication and the instrument of thought, it is the basis for human interaction. Language acquisition is a complex process. It is dependent on both the physical ability of the child to make and understand language as well as the environment in which the child interacts. Language develops as the result of the child's ability to form and imagine symbols or words that are needed to communicate with others.

Language has long been seen as one of the most important factors in the development of young children. The effective preschool classroom is a language rich classroom. Language is used for self-expression, communication of feelings and needs, and as a way to use pieces of information to form concepts. Most children, by the time they reach preschool age are able to speak in sentences, have a workable vocabulary, and use language effectively. The preschool curriculum builds on what the child already knows. The child's language is extended and expanded. Language models are provided to facilitate awareness of the structure of language. Children are given many opportunities to use language.

As with pre-reading, it is important to be both sensitive and respectful to the child's cultural and ethnic background. Children's language experience and acquisition is based on the significant people in the child's life. It is important that the child's home language is used and respected in the classroom with the knowledge that the goal of the language curriculum is to enable the child to become an effective communicator. Children need to be provided the opportunity to enter the mainstream of society. Effectively communicating in the dominant language is one method of entering the mainstream.

Every part of the early childhood curriculum can encourage language development and acquisition. Music, science, play, math, and motor activities all provide experiences for conceptual development and vocabulary enhancement. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ Use of open-ended questions and active listening.
- ❑ The development of auditory skills.
- ❑ The provision for verbal expression.
- ❑ The provision of solid, concrete experiences of which children can talk about and on which concepts can be formed.
- ❑ The encouragement of conversation and dialog.
- ❑ Listening to what children have to say.
- ❑ Listening to good literature.
- ❑ Providing the materials needed to participate in role playing and dramatic play.
- ❑ The provision of verbal stimulation and expansion.
- ❑ The development of pragmatic skills such as taking turns in a conversation, and not interrupting the speaker.

Art

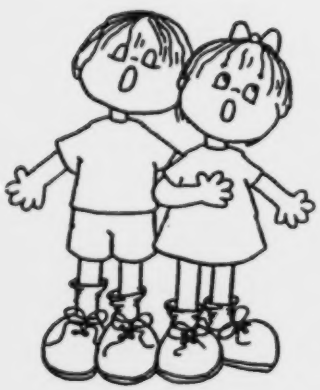
Art is a natural part of the child's life. Young children are eager to express themselves when given the opportunity. Because they are young, children have an unspoiled attitude that allows them to be spontaneous in their expression of art. Art is a very valuable part of the early childhood curriculum. Art and young children go together. It is an activity in which almost all preschool age children want to participate. Art is a way for children to explore their environment in an uninhibited manner. They are free to create, communicate, and

begin to understand their world through the exploration of a variety of mediums.

Art and other creative experiences contribute to the child's self-knowledge and self-awareness. Through art, a child can express his or her own uniqueness while beginning to appreciate the uniqueness of others. A sense of well-being can be achieved through the artistic and creative processes. Children need to experience art and to be introduced to the content of art. Art has value in and of itself, and should be child-centered. Art is the expression of the individual. The purpose of the art curriculum is to foster creativity. The environment needs to be prepared for exploration and experimentation while providing materials suited to the developmental needs of the child. Children's creativity is enhanced when art and creativity is viewed as a process as opposed to a product. Children become inhibited by too much emphasis on neatness and technique. Ideas flow when children are given the opportunity to let them come. The teacher must be viewed as the facilitator of the creative process. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ The fostering of creativity through art experiences.
- ❑ The provision of a wide range and diversity of creative activities and experiences.
- ❑ Allowing access to creative materials and supplies as well as ample space to stimulate independence.
- ❑ Developing a sense of cultural awareness and aesthetic appreciation.
- ❑ Helping children develop an attitude of enjoyment and success with art activities.
- ❑ Exposure to different styles of visual art in the form of pictures and/or posters in the environment.

Music



One of the first experiences many children have with music is when their mother, father or other loved one rocks, sings or hums a lullaby to them while they are very young. Children seem to have a natural love for music. They often make up songs or tunes while they play. Music, when it is a joint creative effort, can become the link between the individual and the group. It is a form of socialization. Music is a way to be creative, yet creative music may not necessarily be original. Music can be inventive based upon the familiar, yet still be creative. Music is a way to teach, not by instruction, but by feeling. It is through music that the child is encouraged to keep and develop imaginative growth and to eagerly experience life to the fullest.

Music is an avenue for emotional release and the expression of feelings. Music can calm and it can also excite. Through the creative expression and success that music allows, a child can build a positive feeling of self-worth. Children simply enjoy music, the tunes,

the lyrics, the rhythm, the tempo, and the creative spontaneity that music allows.

Music needs to be an integral part of the preschool curriculum. The main purpose of the music curriculum is the child's enjoyment and appreciation of and for music. The curriculum should have a child focus with the teacher as a facilitator. Music should be planned for and part of the daily program, but it should also be used spontaneously to support other parts of the curriculum, to assist with transitions, and to create variety. Preschool age children need the freedom of expression and participation. No child should be forced to participate in music activities. Care should be given to allow space, time and access for children to actively explore musical activities. Teachers need to feel comfortable with their own feelings about music. Teachers need not be accomplished musicians, but their feelings about music will greatly influence the children. Music is a universal language. One does not need to know terminology, or the music mechanics, to enjoy and to share that enjoyment with children. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ Activities that encourage participation, spontaneity, and creativity for students as they experience music.
- ❑ The incorporation of music spontaneously into a variety of activities.
- ❑ The expression of mood and feelings of music selections through body movements or other creative activities.
- ❑ Awareness of contrasts in music such as low and high, fast and slow, soft and loud.
- ❑ The use of rhythm instruments and activities, records, and other activities to provide a variety of musical experiences.
- ❑ Success, joy, and pleasure through musical experiences.
- ❑ Developing an appreciation for music, which would include the music of other cultures and other times.

Science

In an early childhood curriculum, science should be a discovery process rather than a memorization of facts. The young child has a drive to explore and to discover the world. The child wants to know and interpret, and then to control and understand. As the child watches, wonders, studies, and questions, science is experienced as part of everyday life. The child's sense of wonder must be kept alive. Through active discovery the child begins to understand the orderliness of the universe and develops a method of thinking and finding answers to questions. Children must not feel a sense of failure as they discover and explore. A knowledge of where the individual child is and where the group is as a whole will assist the teacher to help the child clarify and summarize his or her findings. The teacher needs to share in this joy for learning.

As with every part of the early childhood curriculum, science needs to be planned for and be a part of the integrated total curriculum.

However, the spontaneity of science should be encouraged. The science curriculum should not be left to chance, nor should chance happening be ignored. Much of the success of the science curriculum is dependent upon the teacher's ability to guide and direct the children's attention through the skillful use of questioning. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ The discovery of both physical and life science.
- ❑ The introduction of the scientific method through pausing to wonder, reflect, speculate and to draw conclusions.
- ❑ Encouraging the child to question conditions and events.
- ❑ The sharing of ideas and the recording of findings.
- ❑ Providing activities that involve change, variation, adaptation, and relationships.
- ❑ The exploration of cause and effect relationships.
- ❑ An appreciation for the world in which the child lives and a knowledge of the interdependency of all living things.
- ❑ Providing concrete activities for the child to explore and experiment.

Nutrition

The preschool years are the optimal time for introducing nutritional concepts to children. It is during these years that children begin to make choices about what and how much they eat. Eating patterns and food habits developed in the early years often remain throughout life. The foods children eat affect their growth, development, ability to learn, and general behavior. In order for children to make the right choices about food, a wide variety of wholesome foods and food experiences should be made available to them. Children learn most effectively by being actively involved. Children need to be encouraged to be interested in food and involved in the preparation of their food. Food activities provide natural opportunities for teaching young children values in relation to nutritious eating. Meal times provide valuable experiences in addition to providing nutrition. Nutrition information combines well with many other curricular areas for young children. A simple cooking experience could be used to teach many concepts such as the following:

- ● Health--the importance of washing hands before eating.
- ● Science--how foods grow, how they change texture or shape when cooked.
- ● Language--names of foods.
- ● Art--colors, texture, shapes.
- ● Social Studies--who grows and works with food.
- ● Math--counting pieces of food or measuring ingredients.

Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ Information that there is a wide variety of food sources, and that plants and animals are sources of food.

- ❑ Opportunities for the building of self-help skills through preparing, serving, and eating meals.
- ❑ The exploration of other cultures through their foods.
- ❑ Knowledge that a good diet includes a wide variety of foods, and that foods can be classified into food groups.
- ❑ Food exploration that demonstrates that food may be prepared and eaten in many different ways, and that food may vary in color, texture, smell, and shape.

Social Studies

Early in life, infants begin the study of self through the exploration of their hands and body. They also begin exploring their environment and their world. They will do this through touching, feeling, smelling, and tasting. Learning about others is based upon self-knowledge. It is knowledge of self and the relationship to others that the understanding of other people and other cultures is built. It is also from this knowledge, and increased understanding, that the ability to be tolerant and accepting of self and people in general grows.

One of the major purposes of the social studies curriculum for young children is to learn of the child's own society, his or her place in it, and the ability to function in that society. Cooperation, responsibility for one's own actions, and the desire to be helpful and considerate to others are some of the traits necessary to function in a society of people. Social studies is a curricular area that emphasizes that ability to make effective decisions, to look at the criteria in making the decision, and to evaluate the decision made. The ability to think critically can help children make an important journey. That journey is to be sympathetic to the feelings and thoughts of others. They can also develop the ability to step outside of self and to objectively examine the ideas and feelings of others.

Learning about self and others, about the physical, social and emotional dimensions, is critical to the development of positive self-esteem. The comparison with other people may help children to understand their uniqueness as human beings. Social studies in the preschool classroom deals with the children's individual skills, responsibilities, likes, dislikes, and feelings. It also deals with the relationships of the groups to which the child belongs: family, school, and community. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ Exploration of community and community helpers.
- ❑ Appreciation for and exploration of the environment.
- ❑ Career awareness and role playing.
- ❑ Respect for one's own culture and the culture of others.
- ❑ The development of critical thinking skills.
- ❑ Exploration of family and family roles.
- ❑ Helping children learn about their world by providing firsthand experiences on their developmental level.
- ❑ Providing activities for children to increase and clarify existing

concepts, and frame of reference.

- ❑ Helping children build good relationships with other children and adults through positive group experiences.

Play

Play, in general, is the most important learning tool of young children. Through play children are able to expand and deepen concepts and make them their own. Ideas are expressed through the practice and the extension of language. Motor skills are developed through the performance of active and make believe tasks. Social development is stimulated as children try out a variety of social roles, interact, and cooperate with others in small group role playing.

Play

You say you love your children,
And are concerned they learn today?
So am I--that's why I'm providing
A variety of kinds of play.

You're asking me the value
Of blocks and other such play?
Your children are solving problems.
They will use that skill everyday.

You're asking what's the value
Of having your children play?
Your daughter's creating a tower;
She may be a builder someday.

You're saying you don't want your son
To play in that "sissy" way?
He's learning to cuddle a doll;
He may be a father someday.

You're questioning the interest centers;
They look like useless play?
Your children are making choices;
They'll be on their own someday.

You're worried your children aren't learning;
And later they'll have to pay?
They're learning a pattern for learning;
For they'll be learners always.

- Leila P. Fagg

Play, which rises from within, expresses the child's personal, unique response to the environment. Curriculum content will include:

- ❑ The use of learning centers to provide activities geared to individual needs, interests and activities.
- ❑ The encouragement of children to be independent, to make decisions, and to play imaginatively.
- ❑ The use of props and equipment to encourage dramatic play.
- ❑ Allowing ample space and time for play.
- ❑ Enriching play through the use of story games, movement based on poems, and creative rhythms.

Special Needs

All children learn through play. Both handicapped and nonhandicapped preschoolers learn about their environment through active participation. Children need to explore, experience, and manipulate their environment whether they are handicapped or not. Play expands all areas in the child's development: emotional, social, intellectual, and physical. Young children with developmental lags or handicapping conditions require individualized educational experiences to help them achieve their fullest potential. The preschool classroom that provides for child-initiated activities, that is play-based, and provides for developmentally appropriate activities is especially suited for the handicapped preschooler. This type of preschool classroom expects children to mature at varying rates; differences in skills are expected and accommodated. Preschool teachers tend to focus on the process of the educational experience rather than the product.

The needs of a handicapped youngster are best met in the preschool classroom through a merging of the early childhood and special education disciplines. Early childhood education stresses educating the whole child in a play-based curriculum, while special education emphasizes diagnosing the handicap and providing a prescription. Early childhood education must be the base upon which the special education curriculum is built. There must be a knowledge of developmental levels and of how children learn, as well as the ability to work with specific disabilities. Handicapped children have the same development of play behaviors as non-handicapped children. Depending on the handicap, however, specific patterns of play behavior may not appear until a later chronological age. When planning curriculum to meet the needs of the handicapped youngster, it is important to recognize that children are first and foremost children regardless of their handicapping condition. Providing for the needs of a handicapped child in the preschool classroom consists of:

- ❑ Developmentally appropriate assessment instruments.
- ❑ Culturally appropriate assessment instruments.
- ❑ Knowledge of normal child growth and development.
- ❑ A diagnostic/prescriptive approach to determine the specific instructional needs of the child.
- ❑ Provision of adjunct services to meet the special needs.
- ❑ Avoidance of the stigma that can accompany traditional labeling.

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